



# Family Support and Literacy Framework

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## *Supporting Arizona's Families*

This framework provides an overview of current trends in family support and literacy, highlighting the work of First Things First (FTF) in addressing service gaps and assisting with building an early childhood system. The intent of this framework is to advance the discussion on system initiatives in FTF's Family Support and Literacy Division, with a focus on aligning program goals and the coordination of services across programs to meet the needs of Arizona's children and families. This system framework is constructed on evidence-based research, FTF research and evaluation findings, Family Support and Literacy policy committee and stakeholder input that is flexible and adaptable for local implementation.



## FIRST THINGS FIRST

### Family Support and Literacy Framework

#### What Is Family Support?

“To thrive, young children need . . . stable, nurturing families who have enough resources and parenting skill to meet their basic needs. These are the ingredients that put young children on a pathway to success.” – Helene Stebbins and Jane Knitzer, National Center on Children in Poverty

First Things First has a vision that all children will have the opportunity to grow up in stable, strong and nurturing families. Families are their children’s first and most influential caregivers and teachers, and they play a critical role in shaping their children’s lives and future outcomes. Research has confirmed that early relationships between children and adults are the primary influence on brain growth and development. As the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2006) notes, “Healthy development depends on the quality and reliability of a young child’s relationships with the important people in his or her life... even the development of a child’s brain architecture depends on the establishment of these relationships.”

Humans are inherently social beings. Infants prefer human faces over other objects and can recognize their mother’s voice shortly after birth. This initial preference sets the foundation for a lifetime of learning within a social context. “All learning takes place in the context of relationships and is critically affected by the quality of those relationships” (Edelman, 2004). Intellectual, social, emotional, physical and behavioral development are all affected as young children experience the world in an environment of relationships. For example, the reciprocal interactions which occur between mother and baby during the course of daily routines (i.e. smiles, gestures, vocalizations, touch, and eye contact) builds and strengthens the architecture of the brain as it rapidly develops in the first three years of life. The general home environment, toys, books, activities and other interactions in the family setting are also strongly related to cognitive and early language and literacy development and later academic achievement. Healthy relationships and family environments are associated with stronger cognitive skills and social competence which lead to later success and achievement in school (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child , 2006).

#### **Factors Influencing Families’ Abilities to Support Their Children’s Growth and**

#### **Development – Strengths and Risks**

Family characteristics significantly impact children’s potential for success in school and life. Indicators of a child’s well-being and readiness for success include a family’s economic stability, parents’ understanding of their child’s development and the support families receive in order to nurture and teach their children (Kagan & Rigby, 2003).

## Economic and Educational Factors

Research studies and policy interventions often focus on the effects of poverty on children's growth and development. Although families at all income levels are vulnerable when they experience challenges that put children at risk, such as domestic violence, child maltreatment and depression, these challenges are especially prevalent among low-income families. Families with lower incomes cope with tremendous amounts of stress related to various concerns, such as covering the cost of rent, paying for a sick child to see a doctor, or ensuring the family has enough to eat. Sometimes, families must even cope with loss of housing and homelessness. Children raised in such high stress environments are at risk for suffering many adverse developmental effects, such as poor health and school failure, which can create a cycle of poverty across generations.

Research also demonstrates that parents' understanding of child development, beliefs about how children grow and develop, concepts of parenting, and parenting behaviors each differ by socioeconomic status (SES) (Hoff, Larson, & Tardif, 2002). For example, higher SES parents expect their children to attain certain developmental milestones at a younger age than do parents with lower SES, and parents with higher incomes believe they have more control over their children's outcomes than do parents with lower incomes. These differences hold true for Arizona families as well. According to the First Things First commissioned Family and Community Report: A Baseline Report on Families and Coordination (2009), "Lower SES parents were more likely to believe that the capacity for children's learning is set at birth, compared to higher SES parents. The belief that children's learning ability is unchangeable may manifest in parenting behavior that is less verbal, less interactive, or that provides fewer learning opportunities (Hoff et al., 2002)."

A mother's educational attainment has also been cited in research as a strong predictor of children's health status, well-being and school achievement (Magnuson and McGroder, 2002). It has been found that "mothers without a high school diploma are less likely than mothers with a high school diploma to provide enriching early childhood experiences for their children birth through five years. [Additionally], children of mothers without a high school diploma score lower on tests of math and reading skills upon entry to kindergarten..." (Building Bright Futures, 2007).

In their seminal study on language development, Hart and Risley (1995) made a significant discovery illustrating the importance of parent education and background on children's learning. Hart and Risley found that children in homes with professional level parents heard an average of 2,153 words per hour compared to 616 words per hour heard by children in homes of families where income and education were typically low. "With few exceptions, the more parents talked to their children, the faster the children's vocabularies were growing and the higher the children's IQ test scores at age three and later."

## Family Demographics and Environmental Risks

The first three to five years are a critical time for children's growth and development. The greater the number of risk factors children experience during that time, the more likely their outcomes will be poor. A variety of family demographic and environmental risk factors can increase the need for targeted family support strategies. Examples of such risks include: low birth weight, food insecurity, maternal depression, child abuse or neglect, and environmental hazards, such as lead exposure. A research study examining maternal mental health, substance use and domestic violence in the first year of a baby's life found that exposure to these types of risks can result in a wide variety of behavior problems which often hinder children's healthy physical and developmental growth (Whitaker, Orzol and Kahn, 2006).

In addition to the various environmental factors affecting young children's development, the very make-up of the family unit also plays an important role. Both the people who make up each family and how it is structured impact how families function. Closely tied to culture, today's families vary greatly and may include single mothers or fathers, traditional, two-parent families, foster families, grandparents raising grandchildren, stepparents, and gay or lesbian families. Extended family members may also play a large role in raising children within some cultures and communities.

Family make-up can contribute to or inhibit the development of stable families that are then able to meet the comprehensive needs of their children. Therefore, understanding the structure of families and how they function must inform the development of appropriate family supports services.

## Community Characteristics

Internal supports within families are further affected by several characteristics of the community in which a family lives. Whether a community is in an urban or rural area often determines the quantity and sufficiency of the resources available. For example, Cochise County in Arizona cites its massive land area and mostly rural communities as strong factors in creating several challenges such as lack of public transportation and access to information and service providers (Needs and Assets Report Cochise Regional Partnership Council, 2008, 2010). Without sufficient services available, and with limited access to information, families living in geographically isolated or remote areas lack important support structures on which many families often rely.

The economic strength of communities also influences family stability. Loss of local businesses such as mining or agriculture can create situations of poverty where booming towns and communities once existed. Facing such financial stresses places families at high risk and creates greater need for external support networks and structures.

## **Components of a Strong Family Support System**

First Things First demonstrates its commitment to the family by including a component of family support as a part of Arizona's comprehensive early childhood system. To understand

what creates a statewide early childhood system, leading organizations from across the country such as Zero to Three, Center for Law and Social Policy, and the Smart Start Technical Assistance Center, formed the Early Childhood Systems Working Group and developed a framework for building strong, statewide early childhood policies. The workgroup defined family support as “economic and parenting supports to ensure that children have nurturing and stable relationships with caring adults.” According to the national workgroup, elements of a family support infrastructure include: varied and targeted voluntary services, economic supports, cultural responsiveness, strong and safe communities, and statewide information systems. Together, these components provide a system of support that strengthens families in ways that allow them to provide stable and enriching environments for their children.

### Varied, Voluntary Services for Families

All children need caring parents and adults who provide nurturing and stable relationships for good developmental outcomes and success in school and life. “But even the most educated parents cannot provide all of the learning tools children need, and many parents have not been prepared with an understanding of how children learn and develop” (Tangible Steps Toward Tomorrow, 2007). Many parents receive support and information from their extended family, as well as their friends, neighbors, faith communities, schools and other community agencies. For some families, this informal support network is sufficient to help them succeed in their parenting roles. However, a variety of circumstances that families face often require more formal, targeted family support strategies. Parents’ access to these targeted supports is essential to ensuring optimal outcomes for children.

Effective program models of family support meet standards of practice and are matched with the various populations that require some level of support. The approaches that have proven to be most effective in producing positive outcomes for families and their children include the following characteristics:

- **Varied Types of Intervention and Methods of Delivery:** Models may include short-term or ongoing home visitation, parenting classes, parent support groups, or parent-child playgroups. Regardless of type, families must be provided opportunities to practice new skills and to reflect on their new knowledge.
- **Comprehensive Service Provision:** Services focus on the comprehensive physical, social, emotional and educational needs of children and their families, rather than take a narrow, one-dimensional approach. An example would be to embed literacy development and overall well-being of the child within the support of the parent-child relationship rather than limiting a home visitor to only discussing with parents how to read to their children.
- **Use of Family-centered Practices:** In a family-centered model the focus is on both the strengths and the needs of each individual family. The family is also engaged as a partner in setting goals, determining methods to achieve those goals and evaluating the outcomes.

- Evidence-based Curricula and Practice: Standards of practice for family support programs have been developed based on evidence related to the elements which produce the best outcomes, i.e. strong, stable families which produce children who are healthy and successful in school and life.
- Targeted Service Delivery and Type of Intervention: The type of service matches what is most appropriate for the targeted population of families.
- Continuum of Intensity and Duration: The level of intensity must match the needs and wishes of the families involved.
- Coordinated and Seamless in Delivery: Providers work together across communities, create mutual referral systems and coordinate program eligibility so that families can access a range of services and supports without duplication.
- Quality Assurance and Continuous Program Improvement: a quality assurance system that includes continuous performance and program monitoring utilizing a team approach. Results are used to inform and strengthen practice and the overall early childhood system.

### Economic Supports

Economic stability is often defined as whether or not a family falls within a poverty designation. However, researchers have determined that it actually takes between 1.5 and 3.5 times the poverty level to provide for a family's basic needs (National Center for Children in Poverty). In considering how economic stability plays a role in the family support infrastructure, the Early Childhood Systems Working Group (2006) defined economic supports as those that "provide for financial stability and self-sufficiency." According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2009), "State policies that support parenting and promote families economic security improve the odds that families have the resources they need to meet the basic needs of their children."

There are a variety of economic supports recommended by policy makers across the country. Some examples of these supports include the following (adapted by recommendations from NCCP 2009):

- Paid Medical/Maternity Leave for Families: As the only industrialized country without a paid family-leave policy, states must take on this issue locally. Family leave policies assure parents who cannot afford to stay home with their children during the critical period after birth are still provided with such an opportunity. Some states now offer partial wage replacement, but such benefits are often limited to only larger businesses and corporations which choose to provide it.
- Various Tax Credits: Tax credits which would assist family economic security include a refundable earned income credit and/or state dependent care credit. Credits reduce a family's taxable income and thus reduce tax liability.

- **Maintain Copayments for Child Care Subsidies at or below 10 Percent of Family Income:** Some states may choose to eliminate copayments, or use a sliding scale dependent on income. Keeping payments at a maximum of 10 percent of family income maintains a rate that is more closely in line with a national average of seven percent paid by most families for child care services.

First Things First believes that Cultural Responsivity is an intentional life long journey that holistically explores, embraces, values and responds to the diversity of the human experience by creating a (safe) environment of mutual respect. Culture refers to “shared and learned ideas and products of a society. It is a shared way of life of people, including their beliefs, their technology, their values and norms, all of which are transmitted down through the generations by learning and observation” (Responsiveness to Family Cultures, Values, and Languages, 2002). Building upon the concept of learning in the context of relationships, it is important to consider each family’s culture, the culture of local communities, ongoing policy and strategy development.

An effective family support system ensures that as policies and procedures are developed, they are viewed through a lens of cultural sensitivity and appropriateness. A culturally responsive system is one which responds to the varying backgrounds and cultures by providing materials which have been translated into the language of the participating families and delivers curricula that reflect the lives of the families served. In addition, the staff working with families reflects the racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of those families. Families are always treated with respect, regardless of their parenting beliefs and practices which may differ among cultures.

### Strong and Safe Communities

For young children growing up, it is just as important for their neighborhood to be a safe, violent-free place as it is their home environment. Eiseman, Cove, and Popkin (2005) indicate that children living in communities where violence and drug use are rampant “...confront numerous obstacles, including a social world dominated by the drug economy, bad schools and, frequently, parents coping with problems of their own. These obstacles place them at risk for serious consequences including developmental delays, behavior problems, and poor school outcomes.” Children have greater rates of success when living in neighborhoods where they do not have to cope with the worries of an unsafe environment.

Healthy physical development of young children can also be affected by the presence of toxins in an environment. Presence of lead in paints or waste in dumps close to public spaces adds to the dangers. Families must be afforded safe choices of where to live and raise their children, regardless of income.

Having access to quality recreational and educational opportunities is also considered to act as a potential contributor to positive outcomes for children (Eiseman, et. al. 2005). How neighborhoods are designed impact children’s health in other ways as well. “Today’s children are spending less of their free time outdoors in the neighborhood, with negative consequences for health” (Handy, Cao, and Mokhtarian, 2008). In their study on neighborhood design and

children's play, Handy, et. al found "support for a causal relationship between neighborhood design and outdoor play and point to cul-de-sacs, larger front yards, lower crime, and increased interaction among neighbors as key characteristics that influence outdoor play by increasing parents' perceptions of safety."

Particularly, safe and strong communities include:

- Safe neighborhoods
- Family activities
- Parks and other recreation spaces
- Sports activities
- Family friendly libraries
- Safe places - for children to socialize, gather, and play such as Boys and Girls clubs
- Faith based opportunities such as churches, synagogues or mosques

### Statewide Information Systems

Having "accurate information about raising young children and appropriate expectations for their behavior" has been cited by the Doris Duke Strengthening Families Initiative as one of five key protective factors that improve child outcomes and reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2008). All families, regardless of background can benefit from education and information related to child development and health, as well as access to resources, supports and services. At some point during the course of parenting, all families have questions and seek information. Some families may be searching for nearby family child care providers, while others may be concerned about their child's learning. Still families may be trying to cope with the everyday issues of parenting like toilet training and feeding a picky eater.

While there is no one single support strategy or solution to providing information to families (Daro, 2006), an integral component of an effective family support infrastructure ensures that information is available in a variety of forms and addresses the varying concerns families may have. Information provided must do the following:

- Connect programs across communities
- Be available in a variety of forms
- Be culturally appropriate
- Build on family strengths and knowledge
- Provide accurate information
- Offer opportunities for sharing among and between families through various family and social networks



## **Gaps in Arizona's Family Support System**

### ***Strengths in Arizona***

Arizona currently has a number of family support components in place. However, these services are often disjointed, have limited scope and lack the coordination which might produce the best outcomes. While many improvements are necessary to assure all Arizona families have what they need to provide nurturing, stable and caring environments for their children, the state does have some existing integral pieces of a family support infrastructure.

Across the state, several agencies provide varied and voluntary programs targeted to specific populations to assist families with a number of different skills. Some programs target prevention of abuse and neglect while other programs support adult education and family literacy. Examples of varied and voluntary programs include:

- Healthy Families Arizona
- Newborn Intensive Care Follow-up
- Early Head Start/Head Start
- Arizona Family Literacy

Other ways which Arizona currently provides a family support infrastructure are with a variety of economic supports. Arizona provides several of the economic policies recommended by the NCCP which include the following:

- An established minimum wage which exceeds the federal level
- Personal income tax exemption for single parent families of three at or below poverty
- Possible eligibility for child care subsidies for parents in school

With 21 federally recognized tribal nations located in Arizona, and a population where almost one-third speak a language other than English in their home (Building Bright Futures, 2007); it is clear that Arizona residents are a widely diverse group of people. Such diversity requires significant efforts to understand and be responsive to the varying family cultures in our communities. Ways in which Arizona currently responds to families of diverse backgrounds include the following:

- Recognition of tribal sovereignty and incorporation of tribal liaisons within each state agency.
- Migrant education programs provided through the Arizona Department of Education
- Refugee relocation programs through various agencies
- Community based programs which provide parenting information, materials and services in languages other than English.
- Providing support for Dual Language Learners

Ensuring Arizona families have opportunities to raise their children in safe and strong neighborhoods is imperative to building a strong family support infrastructure. The desire to create communities in which people feel safe and residents want to raise their children is demonstrated with the following services, programs, and policies across the state:

- Public libraries (city, county, state)
- Public park and recreation areas (private, city, county, state & national)
- Variety of family friendly museums
- Lead abatement programs
- New construction safety regulations (e.g. pool fencing)
- Good neighbor programs (e.g. Block Watch)
- Family and community resource centers

Families in Arizona may or may not choose to participate in the various targeted programs such as home visitation or parenting classes. However, most families at some point seek information related to children and/or parenting. As noted pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton explains, parents have two universal worries regardless of background or income. These include, “Is my baby alright?” and “Am I a good enough parent?” Arizona assists families in answering these concerns through a variety of statewide information systems. These include:

- Birth to Five Helpline
- Arizona Parent Kits
- Resource and referral services

Although Arizona programs and services contain elements of each of the essential family support infrastructure components, current data reveals that many gaps remain.

Due to the economic downturn and shrinking state budgets; 2009 to present, many of the important services considered to be integral to a family support system are being discontinued or drastically reduced hindering their capacity to produce significant outcomes. For example, as of 2007, funding to Arizona Family Literacy programs had been reduced by 72% causing more than 800 families to lose services (Building Bright Futures, 2007). These losses often occurred in some of the neediest communities within Arizona, such as Flagstaff where the target population included homeless families. More recently in 2009 and 2010, reductions to the budget for DES has impacted services through Healthy Families, a home visitation program targeted to high risk families with the purpose of preventing abuse and neglect. Loss of existing services coupled with the lack of available services in remote or otherwise outlying communities creates a considerable deficit in the family support infrastructure.

### Economic Support Gaps

In addition to gaps in services available, Arizona is faced with an economic situation causing great strains on families. Almost one in every four children in Arizona under the age of six lives in poverty (NCCP, 2009 update). An additional 32% live in families where the income is between

100% and 200% of poverty. With over half the population of young children in Arizona living in families of low income, it is clear that family supports must include a wide array of financial assistance strategies. Although there are a few economic supports in place, additional strategies to provide the financial stability and move families toward self-sufficiency are needed. Arizona continues to only provide child care subsidies to families at or below 165% of poverty leaving many working families without necessary supports to assure their children receive the care they need. Currently, the economic situation across the state has caused a wait list for any newly eligible families. As more families lose income and become unemployed, fewer supports are available. Other gaps in economic supports include a lack of strong family leave policies for the state and few family friendly tax credits.

### Information Systems Gaps

In the First Things First *Building Bright Futures: Arizona's Early Childhood Opportunities 2011* statewide report, families commented that a reliable early childhood development and health information system is still lacking in this state. The report cited the "high number of rural areas and significant differences in family needs" as major barriers to assuring families had access to necessary information and support structures. First Things First Regional Needs and Assets reports further illustrated a lack of awareness among families that existing supports and services were available to them.

### **Family Confidence and Competence**

Additional validation of the state and regional reports' findings are found in the results of the First Things First Family and Community Survey 2008 and 2012. The First Things First Family and Community Survey is conducted every two - three years. The Family and Community Survey is designed to measure many critical areas of parent knowledge, skills, and practice related to their young children. The survey contains over sixty questions, many of them exploring multiple facets of parenting. There are questions on overall knowledge of the importance of early childhood, questions which gauge parent knowledge of specific ages and stages, parent behaviors with their children, as well as parent practices related to utilization of services for their families. The survey presents clear evidence that Arizona families have some understanding of child development but that further information and education outreach is necessary.

Based on the preliminary analysis of the 2012 survey results, a composite of 63% of families report they are competent and confident about their ability to support their child's safety, health and well-being. This one indicator represents a composite measure of critical parent knowledge, skills, and actions. First Things First conducted the analysis on several of the relevant survey indicators to arrive at this composite measure. Over time, the intent is to increase the number of families who report they are competent and confident to support their child's safety, health and well-being.

Individual items from the Family and Community Survey related to specific skills and practices:

- % think a parent can begin to significantly impact their child's development brain prenatally or right from birth
- % of parents reported that they or other family members read stories to their child/children seven days a week
- % of parents strongly agreed that their regular medical provider knows their family well and helps them make healthy decisions
- % believe that children do not respond to their environment until two months of age or later
- % believe that children sense and react to parent emotions only after they reach seven months of age or older
- % believe that children's capacity to learn may be set at birth
- % believe that a child's language benefits equally from watching TV versus talking to a real person

<b>FTF Family and Community Survey Results for Competence and Confidence</b>		
<b>Domain</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2012</b>
Brain development	78% think a parent can begin to significantly impact their child's development brain prenatally or right from birth	83% think a parent can begin to significantly impact their child's development brain prenatally or right from birth
	22% believe that children's capacity to learn may be set at birth	33% believe that children's capacity to learn may be set at birth
Language and literacy development	----- <i>Unavailable for 2008</i>	50% of parents reported that they or other family members read stories to their child/children seven days a week
	47% believe that a child's language benefits equally from watching TV versus talking to a real person	50% believe that a child's language benefits equally from watching TV versus talking to a real person

Access to Medical Home	----- <i>Unavailable for 2008</i>	75% of parents strongly agreed that their regular medical provider knows their family well and helps them make healthy decision
Social Emotional development	48% believe that children do not respond to their environment until two months of age or later	50% believe that children do not respond to their environment until two months of age or later
	27% believe that children sense and react to parents emotions only after they reach seven months of age or older	29% believe that children sense and react to parents emotions only after they reach seven months of age or older

***\*Between 2008 and 2012 the survey results suggest that there is variation in parents' responses. The final report for the Family Community Survey should be available by the end of 2013.***

## **FTF Addresses the Gaps in Arizona's Family Support System**

### **School Readiness Indicators**

Over the past year, members of First Things First Advisory Committees for Early Learning, Health and Family Support and Literacy developed indicators in order to monitor progress in FTF investments. These indicators provide a comprehensive composite measure for young children as they prepare to enter kindergarten, and are approved as School Readiness Indicators. These indicators give us the opportunity to focus on achieving measureable and tangible long-term results for children and assists with defining FTF's role in building an Early Childhood system.

<b>1. #/% children demonstrating school readiness at kindergarten entry in the development domains of social-emotional, language and literacy, cognitive, and motor and physical</b>
<b>2. #/% of children enrolled in an early care and education program with a Quality First rating of 3-5 stars</b>
<b>3. #/% of children with special needs/rights enrolled in an inclusive early care and education program with a Quality First rating of 3-5 stars</b>
<b>4. #/% of families that spend no more than 10% of the regional median family income on quality care and education with a Quality First rating of 3-5 stars</b>
<b>5. % of children with newly identified developmental delays during the kindergarten year</b>
<b>6. #/% of children entering kindergarten exiting preschool special education to regular education</b>
<b>7. #/% of children ages 2-4 at a healthy weight (Body Mass Index-BMI)</b>
<b>8. #/% of children receiving at least six well-child visits within the first 15 months of life</b>
<b>9. #/% of children age 5 with untreated tooth decay</b>
<b>10. % of families who report they are competent and confident about their ability to support their child's safety, health and well being</b>

## Defining Systems Initiatives: Five Focus Areas (Coffman, 2007)

These five components comprise the aspects of a system that, if developed or advanced, can produce broad impacts for the system's intended beneficiaries. These five focus areas although they are across multiple programs, policies, agencies or institutions at the national, state or local level, they share a common goal of achieving better outcomes for children and their families.

*Context* – Improving the political environment that surrounds the system so it produces the policy and funding changes needed to create and sustain it

*Components* – Establishing high-performing programs and services within the system that produce results for system beneficiaries

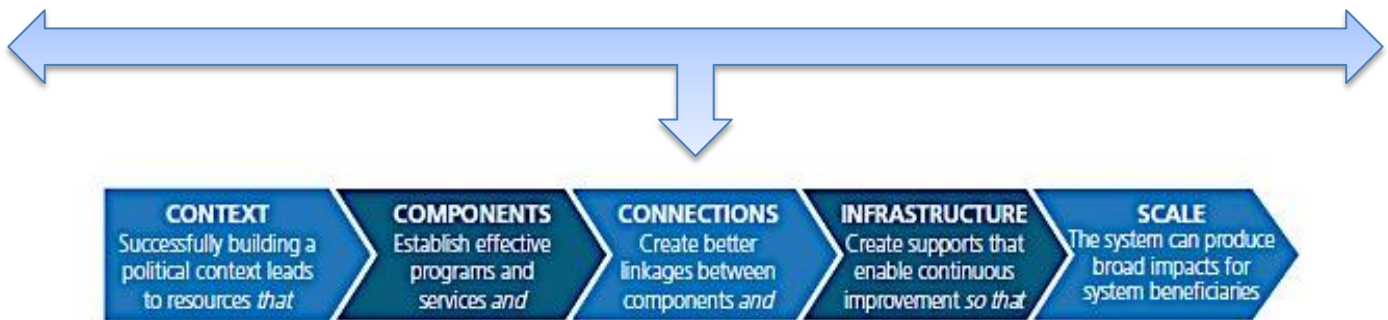
*Connections* - Creating strong and effective linkages across system components that further improve results for system beneficiaries

*Infrastructure* – Developing the supports systems need to function effectively and with quality

*Scale*- Ensuring a comprehensive system is available to as many people as possible so it produces broad and inclusive results for system beneficiaries

The figure below illustrates the basic logic of how these areas work together to produce systems-level impact. (Note that systems initiatives do not have to focus on all five areas. Some may focus only on one or two. Most systems initiatives, however, focus on more than one area, and many focus on four or five.)

The five focus areas can act as a framework for defining systems initiatives. The five part framework offers a way to break down the initiative's complexities into more manageable parts without losing sight of "the whole".



Statewide and regionally funded strategies ensure that a sufficient and comprehensive supply of quality and affordable programs and services are in place to support the components of a system and begin to make connections across systems. FTF has devoted funding to putting in place high quality, high performance, evidence based programs, services and interventions for Arizona's children and families.

Each of the currently funded strategies connects to one or more of the key components of a strong family support infrastructure. The areas that need further discussion and development are context, components, connections, infrastructure and scale.

### Strategy Development

To ensure that regional and state activities related to family support truly meet families' needs and lead to good outcomes for children, a family support strategy development team was formed. This team was primarily comprised of staff from FTF Policy and Research, Regions, Evaluation and Finance. The team also solicited input from state agency partners, providers and other critical stakeholders to design standards of practice (SOP), scopes of work (SOW) and for regional family support Request for Grant Applications (RFGA). The team completed an extensive literature review, analyzed existing evidence-based models, and synthesized the solicited feedback from the various content experts and community members. The team's work resulted in two critical elements of framing effective family support strategies: standards of practice and scopes of work.

Standards of Practice include but are not limited to:

- Comprehensive programming including an infusion of early language and emergent literacy
- Use of a family-centered, strengths-based, and culturally responsive approach
- Recommended staff qualifications, caseload size and/or class size
- Effective supervision activities
- Alignment with existing standards (early learning standards)
- Intensity, frequency and duration of services
- Evaluation and monitoring practices (i.e. regular data collection and reporting, performance measures, and pre and post assessment).

### Statewide Family Support and Literacy Strategies (Statewide Initiatives)

The Arizona Parent Kit contains resources and basic information on child development and health related topics, providing an important first step in addressing the gaps in the family support system. Through the effort of statewide distribution to birthing hospitals and health centers, all parents of newborns in the state will have access to this vital information. Additionally, the kits act as a resource to other parenting support programs such as home visitation and child development workshops for families.

A complementary strategy to the distribution of the Arizona Parent Kit, is the statewide implementation of the Birth to Five Helpline. The Helpline fulfills a fundamental need in Arizona to address the lack of access families have to information. Characteristics of this funded strategy include:

- A toll-free number which allows this service to be available to virtually all families across the state regardless of location, education or income.
- The Helpline is a free service to anyone who accesses it.



- Calls are answered by child development specialists who respond to each caller's individual questions and needs.
- The Helpline combines sensitive, supportive listening with sound information from professionals who have expertise in early childhood development and parenting.

#### Statewide Initiatives (Approved Unfunded Strategies)

FTF has approved several strategies to address the improved coordination of services and collaboration between FTF, state and community agencies. These include family support services which have been funded using regional, state and federal dollars. These coordination efforts will be critical in ensuring families receive what they need in an effective and timely manner, as well as, ensuring that FTF attains its goals. Through coordination and collaboration efforts, improves and streamlines processes including applications, service qualifications, service delivery and follow-up for families with young children. Coordination and collaboration reduces confusion and duplication for service providers and families.

Strategy characteristics of coordination activities include the following:

- Program, Finance, Evaluation and Regional staff working with grantees, state agencies, providers and other community stakeholders to develop and ensure a coordinated and collaborative system of family support in Arizona.
- Efforts to ensure that duplication of service provision is avoided.
- Continuous review and development of standards of practice as new data is collected and analyzed.
- Collaborative efforts with the Evaluation Division to ensure development and data collection of quality assurance measures.

#### Regionally Funded Family Support and Literacy Strategies

For State fiscal year 2013, FTF family support and literacy strategies account for 25.2% or \$41,364,030 of the \$163,976,491 allotted in regional funding plans. Several of the strategies focus on supports within the programs and services component of family support and include activities around home visitation, resource centers and community-based parent education.

Collectively, these FTF statewide and regional strategies in tandem with other state and local family support and literacy efforts will help Arizona's families better understand their young children's development, practice appropriate parenting skills, and make informed choices about good health practices and quality early care and education.

### Highest Regionally Funded Strategies in Family Support and Literacy

Strategy	Component	# of Regional Partnership Councils who have funded strategy	% of total Regional Allotment for Family Support and Literacy Strategies
Home Visitation	Available, varied & voluntary services; Economic supports; Cultural Responsiveness	24	52.3%
Family Resource Centers	Available, varied & voluntary services; Economic supports; Cultural Responsiveness	7	15.2%
Parent Education, Community Based Training	Available, varied & voluntary services; Economic supports; Cultural Responsiveness	19	13.3%

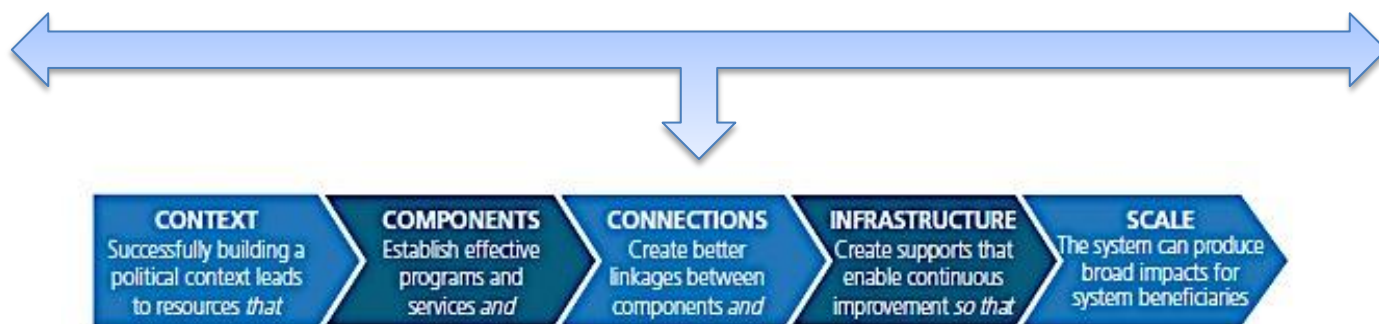
## First Things First Family Support and Literacy Strategies

Below is a brief summary of the FTF Family Support and Literacy Strategies.

1. **Parent Kits**- Gives parents of every newborn in Arizona critical information about healthy parenting practices and how to support their baby's early learning. Provides families of every newborn leaving the hospital with the Arizona Parent Kit, which includes 6 DVDs about good parenting practices, a resource guide and a book to encourage early literacy.
2. **Helpline**- Helps families with young children get free answers to their toughest parenting questions. Provides advice and information on child development and behavior to families through a free phone line staffed by child development specialists.
3. **Parent Outreach and Awareness**- Improves child development by educating parents and connecting them to resources and activities that promote healthy growth and school readiness. Provides families with education, materials and connections to resources and activities that promote healthy development and school readiness.
4. **Newborn Follow Up**- A newborn home visit can provide resources and information to all families where they are – in their homes – soon after coming home from the hospital. This newborn home visit is a bridge that links all families of newborns with the resources in their local community within the comfort and safety of the home environment.
5. **Reach Out and Read**- Expands children's access to reading by promoting child literacy as a part of pediatric primary care. Trains pediatric practices to engage parents and young children in early literacy activities; provides books to pediatricians or their staff to distribute to families with young children.
6. **Curriculum Development—Parent Education** Helps families of young children enhance their parenting skills. Research, develop, and deliver effective parent education for specific target populations and where no appropriate curriculum exists.
7. **Parent Education Community-Based Training**- Strengthens families with young children by providing voluntary classes in community-based settings. Provides classes on parenting, child development and problem-solving skills.
8. **Native Language Preservation**- Connects children in tribal communities to their native language and culture in the critical early years. Provides materials, awareness and outreach to promote native language and cultural acquisition for the young children of Tribal families.
9. **Family Support Coordination**- Improves service delivery to families with young children by streamlining the system and simplifying application procedures. Improves the coordination of, and access to, family support services and programs.
10. **Family Resource Centers** – Strengthens families of young children by providing locally-based information and instruction on health and child development issues. Provides local resource centers that offer training and educational opportunities, resources, and links to other services for healthy child development.
11. **Family Support Children with Special Needs**-Improves the education and health of children with special needs who don't qualify for publicly funded early intervention programs. Provides coaching, group activities and services to the parents of children with special needs. Services are designed to help their child reach his/her fullest potential
12. **Home Visitation**- Gives young children stronger, more supportive relationships with their parents through in-home services on a variety of topics, including parenting skills, early childhood development, literacy, etc. Connects parents with community resources to help them better support their child's health and early learning. Provides voluntary in-home services for infants, children and their families, focusing on parenting skills, early physical and social development, literacy, health and nutrition. Connect families to resources to support their child's health and early learning.
13. **Food Security** - Improves the health and nutrition of children 5 and younger and their families. Distribute food boxes and basic necessity items to families in need of assistance who have children birth to 5 years old.

## Recommendations

A connected set of services and programs will result in better outcomes for Arizona's children and families. According to Coffman, being strategic about the ways in which we connect programs and services so that their collective strengths can be leveraged, will effectively improve child outcomes than if those components operate independently. The goal of connecting programs and services would be to show movement on FTF's school readiness indicator number 10 (% of families who report they are competent and confident about their ability to support their child's safety, health and well being) and continue to build a strong early childhood system.



(Chart reflects system work that is currently in place.)

<b>Context-</b> <i>Improving the political environment that surrounds the system so it produced the policy and funding changes needed to create and sustain it</i>	<b>Components-</b> <i>Establishing high-performing programs and services within the system that produce results for system beneficiaries</i>	<b>Connections-</b> <i>Creating strong and effective linkages across system components that further improve results for system beneficiaries</i>	<b>Infrastructure-</b> <i>Developing the supports systems need to function effectively and with quality</i>	<b>Scale-</b> <i>Ensuring a comprehensive system is available to as many people as possible so it produces broad and inclusive results for system beneficiaries</i>
Early Literacy (BUILD/Piper/ADE)	FTF Funded Strategies	Home Visitation/MIECHV	Home Visitation/MIECHV	Parent Kits
FTF External Affairs Strategies (Outreach Team)	Evidence and Research Based Scopes of Work and Standards of Practice	Family Resource Centers – Tucson/Maricopa Family Alliances (My Child's Ready, Family Support Alliance, Parent Partners Plus)	Professional Development (BUILD)  Early care and education	Helpline

Move on When Reading (3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Retention)		Early Intervention (IDEA Part B/C)	Virginia D. Piper Foundation	Parent Out Reach & Awareness
Child Protective Services Reform		Developmental/Health Screenings	Home Visitation Strong Families AZ: Continuum of Care, Evaluation/ Outcomes, Special Populations, Professional Development  FTF-DES Grant Agreement – to support DES as the state’s admin home for Healthy Families AZ  FTF-DHS Grant to implement MIECHV	Reach Out and Read
		Family Support Coordination	Piper – Maricopa Family Support Alliance	State and Regional Needs and Assets  State and Regional Funding Plans
		State and Regional Funding Plans	Assisting with PAT statewide infrastructure development	State and Regional Evaluation Studies (strategy impact)
		Unfunded FTF strategies		
		FTF Coordination Strategies and grant activities		

**(Context)** FTF has partnered with the BUILD initiative for Early Grade Level Reading, Health, Quality Early Learning, Professional Development, Communications and Engagement committees to take a further look at leveraging current services in the state. BUILD states attempt to gain support for state-level early childhood development systems in the political environment.

**Recommendations:**

- Continued work with BUILD and Read On Arizona will assist with fostering the political environment regarding the importance of family support and literacy.
- Another step in the area of context is to continue to increase public awareness regarding the importance of family support programs to the success of the children and families in the state. Particularly from a preventative approach which could lower the number of children and families involved with Child Protective Services (CPS) or the judicial system versus a reactive approach.
- Another essential step is to continue to increase public awareness on the positive outcomes of home visitation, particularly for first time parents. Current estimates indicate that only 2% of the total populations who are eligible for home visitation services are actually participating in available programs. There is potential to serve at least 10-15% of the total population (DHS 2011 MIECHV Application) which means there is a need to continue to support and implement home visitation programs to serve all potentially eligible children and families.

**(Components)** FTF is working on enhancing the early childhood education system by ensuring that all children and families have access to a comprehensive set of programs and services needed to be successful.

**Recommendations:**

- High performing programs that are currently in place within family support include, Parent Outreach and Awareness, Reach Out and Read, Curriculum Development—Parent Education, Parent Education Community-Based Training, Family Support Children with Special Needs, Family Resource Centers and Home Visitation.
- In order to improve the outcomes of the home visitation strategy, there is a need to increase funding of home visitation programs to serve all eligible families in the state.
- Another aspect of components would be to continue efforts in the Quality Assurance program to measure and ensure high quality service provision.
- Findings from targeted family support regional studies can be used in conjunction with other data sources to better understand the full impact of a set of strategies that are funded in a region.

**(Connections)** Connections ensure that when necessary, needs identified in one subsystem can be referred to and managed by another.

**Recommendations:**

- Outcomes of strong connections increase system coordination and reduce the duplication of services. There are several connections that are being made in various programs.
- *Home Visitation*- connections are being made through the MIECHV federal grant connecting and leveraging programs to strengthen the system. Family Resource Centers are working with community partners to inform and provide local resources to families.
- *Family Support Coordination*- connections are being made by streamlining services applications and procedures to improve the coordination of services to families.
- *Parent Education Community – Based Training*- by providing voluntary classes in a community setting utilizing local supports and resources.
- *Family Support Children with Special Needs*- connections are being made by providing coaching, group activities and services to the parents of children with special needs who do not qualify for publicly funded early intervention programs.
- In building strong connections continued discussions need to occur in and across regions to eliminate or minimize duplication of services. To continue to strive toward a team-based approach when working with families as each family may be involved with several programs and service providers. (E.g. Encourage connections with the home visitor, pediatrician and child care provider.) There are various opportunities for connections across services and programs. Connections can be made by shared goals, standards and data systems. As well as referrals and follow ups.

**(Infrastructure)** A sound infrastructure can create a continued and favorable political environment for growth and system development that is deliberate and accountable. Looking at a systems infrastructure helps to ensure that systems have the supports they need to function effectively and with quality.

**Recommendations:**

- Currently in the area of infrastructure development there is a partnership with Strong Families Arizona which includes a Continuum of Care, Evaluation Outcomes, addressing the needs of Special Populations and Professional Development in the area of Home Visitation.
- Along with the partnership with Strong Families Arizona we have a continued partnership with Department of Economic Services (DES) and Department of Health Services (DHS) with Healthy Families Home Visitation programs.
- A partnership is currently in development with Parents as Teachers Home Visitation to begin to develop an infrastructure to support the Parents as Teachers program model for Home Visitation.
- In the area of Literacy ongoing discussion are occurring with Read On Arizona and Arizona Department of Education (ADE) to discuss the 0-8 continuum of literacy development.

- BUILD professional development efforts should include family support providers as part of the overall Early Childhood Education system to assist with meeting the professional development needs.
- FTF is looking to establish a regional profile of risk and well-being factors of each region. The purpose would be to take a deeper look at the composite of family support and literacy services in each region to ensure that there is a solid match between the services that are provided and the needs of the community.

**(Scale)** Attempts to scale up a system by increasing services and the numbers of children and families served requires high amounts of funding from both public and private partnerships.

**Recommendations:**

- As part of the discussions for Regional Funding Plans for SFY2015 many regions are discussing scale and how they can use unexpended funds to increase the spread and depth of many of their strategies to increase the number of people served.
- Another method would be to include research and evaluation studies to determine impact of strategies which would include ongoing assessment of scope, scale and saturation levels of all strategies.
- Ongoing progress monitoring through measurement of the School Readiness Indicators and Benchmarks will ensure that a comprehensive set of services are being offered to the children and families of Arizona.

The system goals of First Things First can only be achieved through coordination with both public and private entities in order to leverage funding, ease families' access to services, and maximize optimal results for young children. The overall recommendation is to facilitate coordination among the federal, state, private and tribal systems related to early childhood development and health to ensure a common understanding of the systems and to share ownership in ensuring access to services for all children. Through coordination and collaboration efforts it will improve and streamline processes including applications, service qualifications, service delivery and follow-up for families with young children. Thereby reducing confusion and duplication for service providers and families.

This will result in alignment of the early care and education programs and services, including monitoring for access and quality for those programs and services which are the responsibility of varied early care and education agencies and organizations. Improving the flow of services to young families by streamlining the application process and helping local agencies share information and resources. Another recommendation would be to continue to engage community leaders, agencies and stakeholders to strengthen and expand services and programs for families with young children within their communities. The purpose of this goal would be to develop a clear plan for the early care and education system that describes the system, aligns programs and services across all types of settings and with the full continuum of the educational system (P-20), and defines roles and responsibilities of those involved in its implementation.



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